

20 Years
ANNIVERSARY

Food
Services
Training Program
AN OTTAWA MISSION PROGRAM

***Chef Ric and the FSTP gave me the support,
encouragement and practical tools
I needed to re-invent my life.
I am so thankful.***

“

WILLIAM, FOOD SERVICES TRAINING PROGRAM GRADUATE, 2018



The Ottawa Mission and the Food Services Training Program have provided me with the

motivation and confidence I need to build a better future.

I am very grateful for this special gift.

“

MONIQUE

Food Services Training Program graduate
(class of 2017)



© Julie Oliver, The Ottawa Citizen, Saturday July 19, 2008.



© Jean Levac, The Ottawa Citizen, Monday May 9, 2005.



© Bruno Schlumberger, The Ottawa Citizen, Thursday, October 23, 2008.

A CHEF'S VISION



I know what it feels like to have nothing. To feel like you're no one.

But I also know what it feels like to have someone who believes in you. Someone who notices you, takes you under their wing, and shows you a path forward.

Unfortunately, my mother suffered from mental illness, and at age 14, I was homeless and lived a pretty rough life. Despite that, I managed to get a dishwashing job at a *Queen's University* dining hall. It was there that a coworker saw my potential, but knew I was struggling with alcohol, drugs, and homelessness.

One day, he pulled me aside and said: **"You've got talent, but you can do better."** He then went on to mentor me as I worked my way up through the kitchen. It was the start of something special. A little encouragement and guidance both saved and also started my life.

Fast forward decades later: I had gone on to study culinary management, had my chef's *Red Seal*, and was in the middle of an awesome career in the food services industry. I moved to Ottawa and was soon after invited down to The Mission to volunteer in the kitchen.

As I passed meals over the counter and looked into the eyes of those in need, I saw myself: that young, lost teenager who just needed some help to find his way.

I basically never left The Mission after that volunteer shift. Once I started working full-time with the Food Services Program in 2002, I knew I had to do more than feed people in need. **I knew firsthand that with a little bit of encouragement, guidance, and determination, you can change your life for the better through food.** I had never forgotten my own kitchen mentor and I wanted to pay it forward.

So, we launched the *Food Services Training Program (FSTP)* in 2004.

And after 20 amazing years, we've grown from a modest program graduating a handful of students per year, to providing over 70 people a year with the education, guidance, and confidence needed to launch new careers and new lives.

I'm excited to share with you the full story of how the FSTP came to be what it is today. You'll also hear from and learn from some inspiring FSTP graduates.

THE NEED & THE PLAN

Starting in the 1990s and moving into the early 2000s, The Ottawa Mission began to move beyond emergency supports to look at the reasons why people became homeless. Part of this new direction was to **provide support and get people out of homelessness and maintain their independence.**

I knew that the *Food Services Training Program* would be just perfect for this. So, I got to planning with the team. We partnered with the City of Ottawa to help find and screen future students who were relying on *Ontario Works* financial assistance and looking for ways to become self-supporting and better their lives.

We reached out to Algonquin College, who generously donated some copies of *Professional Cooking for Canadian Chefs* textbooks and planned our curriculum around it. I contacted my network of chefs, inviting them to volunteer as guest instructors.

Then, we circulated some ads and posters about the upcoming program and waited for the applications to roll in...



circa
2004

THE FIRST CLASS

On **September 7, 2004**, the first-ever FSTP class gathered inside our building at 35 Waller Street.

Over the next six months, we taught these budding chefs both **practical and theory lessons in:**

-  cooking principles
-  knife skills
-  food handling
-  communication and team building
-  computer and interview skills
-  job etiquette

Cooking modules and lessons included:

- salad and salad dressings
- vegetables and starches
- eggs and dairy
- meat and poultry
- fish and shellfish
- soups, stocks, and sauces

September
2004

2005



MORLEY



I'm so thrilled that students from the early days of the FSTP went on to have long, successful culinary careers.

Morley never expected to have a career in the culinary field. A Cree artist originally from the James Bay area, his art practice ended unexpectedly after a significant theft. **"There was no way to retrieve all the stuff that was stolen,"** he explains. **"I had to find something else to do."** That's when he visited an Indigenous employment officer, who told him about the Food Services Training Program.

He entered the program in 2005 and was excited to learn a new trade. After graduation, he soon found a permanent job in the kitchen of a long-term care facility run by the City of Ottawa. When he arrived, his new boss asked if he could also work between the chefs and the residents, serving the food. Thankfully, his training had prepared him well for this role too, and he quickly realized it was a perfect fit.

"The people that you work with, they're great people," he says. **"And you enjoy the residents. You get to know them."**

Morley went on to work 14 years at the Carleton Lodge before retiring.

GROWING THE PROGRAM

With the early modest success of the program, we looked inward for ways to continue growing and improving. Given that some of our students grappled with mental health and addiction issues in their lives, I realized it would be best to bring on a qualified staff member for support.

Enter The Mission's Client Services team and their Employment and Education Case Manager. **If students needed a safe space to discuss either personal, or training-related matters away from our instructors, they now had that resource.**

As we got comfortable with the educational side of things, we also sought to expand our efforts to help our students find that first kitchen job upon graduation. So, Client Services also began assisting our students with job search skills and resume building.



CATERING

Seeking ways to continue to grow and fund the FSTP, we started offering **catering services to local businesses and special events**. We also introduced a catering module into our program to **provide our students with even more experience and opportunity**.

I'll later share with you just how large and impactful our catering operation has now become!

2006

2007

Sammy

Sammy's winter semester with the Food Services Training Program was memorable for many reasons. Sammy laughs as he recalls with me: **"In 2008 there was a bus strike, I had no choice but to walk from Preston and Somerset to The Ottawa Mission almost every day."** Sammy had come to Canada in 2007 seeking political asylum, and was determined to build a better life.

He spoke very little English and was struggling to find work when he saw a poster for our training program at an employment office. He had prior experience as a cook, so he called right away, reaching me. I was so impressed with Sammy that he made an exception and let him join an already full semester.



When he wasn't training, Sammy worked on his English with one of The Mission's staff members. He eventually got his grade 12 equivalency and even earned a scholarship for the *Culinary Management* program at *Algonquin College*. The Mission continued to help him during those years, even assisting with paperwork to allow his wife to join him in Canada.

After graduating, Sammy spent many years working with a local food services company. In 2021 Sammy came back to The Mission, working as the Kitchen Manager at *Chef Ric's*.

"I feel so blessed to be able to give back and help these new FSTP students, just like I was helped."

2008

WORK PLACEMENTS

During our Winter 2010 session, our students participated in their first work placement internships at the Kanata *Holiday Inn*! Since then, we've been fortunate to have many local restaurants, businesses, and agencies become work placement partners.

As students approach the end of their FSTP studies, they're matched with a suitable partner. From there, they intern and gain practical experience beyond our own kitchen. Oftentimes, they're hired on by their placement kitchen upon graduation.



PARTNERS IN EDUCATION — SLC

We soon realized how valuable the hands-on experience from different commercial kitchens across Ottawa was for our students, and knew we had to enhance that element of the program.

So, we created a new full-time FSTP Supervisor position and partnered with *St. Lawrence College (SLC)* to assist us. For several years, SLC provided resources to help our students find the in-program work placements that often lead to their first paid position in the culinary industry. We're so fortunate to have SLC helping our students out.



“Through initiatives such as skills training and employment opportunities, we've empowered individuals to rebuild their lives and become self-sufficient members of society. The Mission has created a legacy of compassion and community that will continue to inspire generations to come.”

DESIREE IMEISH — SLC EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

2009

2010

2012

2013



Steve

Over the years, our local media has picked up on the inspiring progress of our students. They've profiled several of them, including Steve at his FSTP graduation in 2012:

“It's hard for me to feel proud of myself... But today I do feel proud.”

(Steve) Emmons was one of three graduates from the Food Services Training Program, where he spent five months learning the basics of working in a large-scale, commercial kitchen. This followed a 5-month stay in *The Mission's Lifehouse* (program).

He was asked about the most valuable thing he had learned. He paused for a moment, and broke out in an exaggerated frown. ***“That I'm worth something.”***

Emmons, too, would like the world to know that *The Mission* is not just a shelter and a bunch of free meals.

“So much more goes on behind those brick walls.”*

*Egan, Kelly. *The Ottawa Citizen*; Ottawa, Ont., 15 Dec 2012: E.1

THYME & AGAIN



I met Sheila Whyte at a *University of Ottawa* leadership program back in 2008. Sheila's local catering and gourmet food shop *Thyme and Again* is a community fixture, and once she learned about our program, she was keen to get involved.

It wasn't long before *Thyme and Again* began taking on some of our students for their work placements, and over the years, the business has hired numerous FSTP grads who've gone to be long-serving members of their team.

“There's certainly a huge need for this... where we're looking at so many people that are struggling. The students that have arrived with us have come well-trained, well-prepared, and just with a wonderful attitude.”



FIRST FSTP GALA

Ever since our first class, we've had our students perform a final, practical culinary exam. We thought, why not raise some funds in support of the FSTP through this final exam? And so, the FSTP Gala was born.

We held the first Gala in our shelter dining room, selling tickets for a 4-course meal prepared by our students under the supervision of our volunteer chef-instructors.

At the Gala, our students, who, just months earlier had minimal culinary experience, served up: crab cakes with red pepper chipotle sauce, butternut squash soup, stuffed chicken supreme with a demi-glace reduction, roasted vegetable bundles, wild rice and peaches, and a raspberry torte for dessert.

The fundraising gala was a smashing success, and we've held a version of it every year since!

2014

Jarred

Despite having no prior culinary experience, Jarred reflects on how seamlessly he transitioned into his first kitchen role coming out of the FSTP.

"I felt like I was more prepared to work at my first job than some of the people who already worked there. My practical skills were a lot more refined thanks to the FSTP."

From there, Jarred has cooked for all walks of life, with stops that include *Carleton University*, high-end restaurants, and a retirement home. And I truly mean all walks of life: Jarred now runs his own business called *Zoomy's*, where he prepares fresh food for dogs and cats, including specialized recipes for pets with unique health needs.

"I really liked the program... no one wanted to spend the time to train me, except for the FSTP, and I'm so thankful for it."

2015



2017



2024

FIRST BLUE DOOR GALA

The word got out about our impactful FSTP Gala! Our students were serving up delicious meals and inspiring attendees with their stories of hope and determination. We realized we could hold a larger event in a space outside the Mission. So, our flagship annual fundraising event was created in 2017: *The Blue Door Gala (BDG)*.

The BDG has since opened more opportunities for partners to support the FSTP.

In addition to the multi-course dining experience served up by our students, we added a silent auction fundraiser, sponsored tables, and more. Guests can also sponsor upcoming FSTP students, helping fund their uniforms, kitchen equipment, food, and other supplies.

"In the 10 years since the Gala was first held, the number of people in attendance has grown from a few dozen to over 500 people in 2023."

It's simply an awesome night for our students and for the program!

2017



Karen

“It’s really difficult to start life in a different country,”

says Karen, who moved to Canada from Colombia in 2018. ***“It’s like you start from zero.”***

Karen first came to The Ottawa Mission to volunteer in the kitchen. Within a month, she was starting the Food Services Training Program. Because she was still learning English, the rapid commands of a busy kitchen almost proved too much for her. “It’s fast,” she explains. “Like — ‘I need this!’ ‘I need that!’ — all at the same time.”

She found strength in her faith. “Every single day I’d pray and say, ‘God, please help me, because I can’t do this by myself.’ **After graduation, Karen got a job as a cook at a daycare centre. “It’s just me in the kitchen,” she says, a situation she loves.**



CHEF PHIL

We value our close relationship with the *Canadian Culinary Federation (CCF)* who often meet with, network, and mentor our students. In 2018, I met CCF member Chef Phil Cameron and asked if he was interested in volunteering his expertise. Since then, he’s been one of our valued guest instructors. He shared this with me:

“It’s been so rewarding to see the students that I taught 3 or 4 years ago excelling in the culinary industry now, and I’ve had the pleasure of hiring some FSTP grads myself.

I’ll teach the students a range of skills, including knife handling, preparing and cooking different meats, like bone-in chicken, how to braise, how to walk into a restaurant fridge and make a meal on the fly with whatever ingredients are on hand. I always say: people eat with their eyes first; so, I’ll teach plating skills and promote creativity as well.



I value my time supporting the FSTP and The Mission, because the difference between the helpers and those needing help can be so slim. One traumatic experience can put you in a vulnerable position. Many people only need a few months and some support before they can get back on their feet. Without programs like the FSTP, they wouldn’t have that chance to regain their footing.”

2019

2020



CHEF RIC'S OPENS

With the steady expansion of our program over 15+ years, it was only natural that we eventually outgrew our space within The Ottawa Mission. As we weighed different options to unlock more growth, we connected with the Aggarwals, an amazing family looking to ensure that the site of the former *Rideau Bakery*, a beloved Ottawa staple for almost 90 years, found the right tenants.



Through an wonderfully generous rent of only \$10 per year, we signed a 7-year lease on their building on Rideau Street. With the help of many other generous donors and supporters, we opened **Chef Ric’s**, our cookery, school, and catering social enterprise.

Beyond the revenue from Chef Ric’s storefront and catering going back into our Mission programs and services, this new building crucially provided us with a new FSTP classroom and state of the art kitchen to train our students in.

I was just thrilled with the new space! Suddenly, we had more room to provide theoretical and practical training, without worrying about disrupting the day-to-day operations of The Mission. We could also use the space to prepare and cook meals for our fast-growing food truck program, and true to the building’s roots: added a baking component to our program.

The cherry on top was that Chef Ric’s allowed us to add a third FSTP session per year and train an additional 20–25 students! This meant we effectively tripled the number of graduates from 25 to 75 per year.



2021



Tetiana

Tetiana is a youthful 45-year-old former accountant from Ukraine. A mother of two, she fled with her husband after her home city of Mariupol fell to Russian forces.

After arriving in Ottawa, Tetiana learned about the FSTP. She applied and was accepted into the program, while her husband was offered a job as a cleaner at The Mission's kitchen. The Mission also found them a free apartment close to the shelter and provided furniture and housewares to make it a true home away from home. After graduating from the FSTP, Tetiana joined us for some time, working at Chef Ric's.

"It's an amazing opportunity to start a new life in Canada. It means a lot to me. It's so hard to organize a new life. If not for the help of The Mission, we couldn't do anything."



OUR MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

With Chef Ric's increasing the number of students we can train per class, we're adding elements that ensure all students are best set up for success. The mentorship program is one of those elements.

We offer select graduating students the opportunity to become a mentor for an incoming youth student (aged 18-25). They are paid an honorarium for their role, and we try our best to pair a mentor with a student who has a similar background or lived experience. During their student's trial shift, orientation week, and once a week for the first 4 weeks of the program, **mentors are on hand to meet with the student, assist them, and altogether help them adapt to the program.**

We're incredibly excited for our Mentorship Program to develop further as we continue to offer more and more people the opportunity to change their lives!

2022

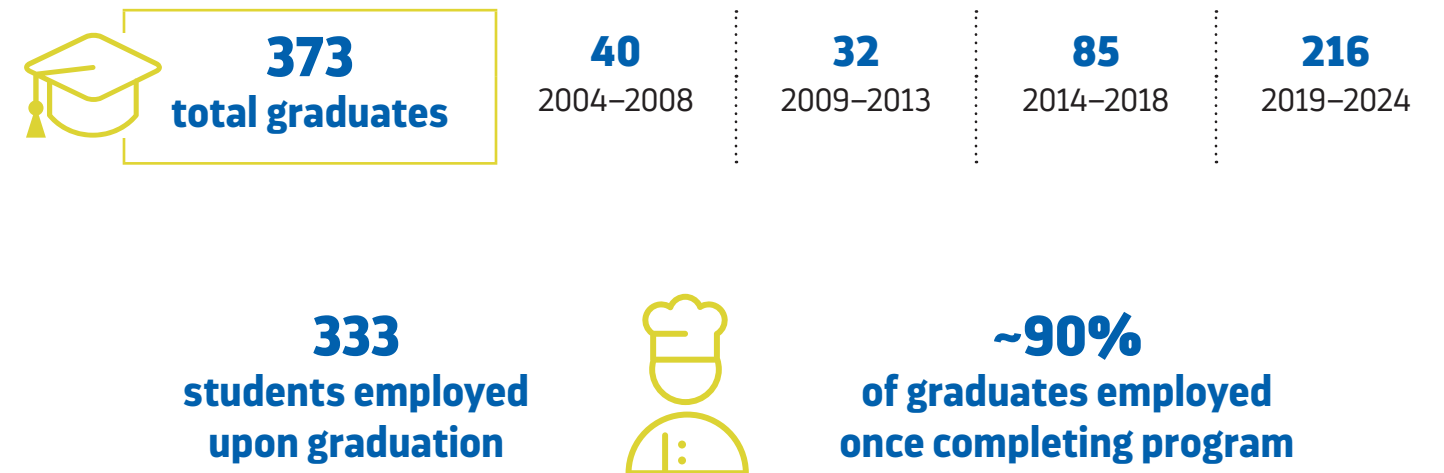
2024

THROUGH 20 YEARS

There you have it. 20 years of the Food Services Training Program! I am so proud of what this program has become over the past two decades.

With the Chef Ric's space allowing us to train up to 35 students in each cohort, we're now training at least 5x the number of students per class, compared to how many we trained per year back when this all started out.

Here's a quick look at some numbers:



With one more cohort to train in 2024, we should break 400 graduates from the FSTP.

Over 400 people...

...who've received the training needed to either **reclaim or launch their careers and lives.**

...from such diverse backgrounds: fathers, mothers, teenagers, grandmothers, people who've called Ottawa home their entire lives, and people new to Canada.

...who, upon applying for our program, only needed to share **one common characteristic: a drive to change their lives for the better.**

And we're just getting started!



RAVEN

“I came to Ottawa with 3 kids and only 3 bags. I was starting from scratch.”

Raven first heard about our Program while staying at a local women’s shelter. She had left Thunder Bay out of necessity and in search of a better future.

One of the things I’m most proud of about our program is how accessible and flexible we make it; because there are so many barriers that might prevent someone in need from improving their life.

“I’m a single mom.” Raven shares. *“I don’t think other programs would allow me to work around my schedule of caring for my daughter, but the FSTP did.”*

Raven came in and excelled in our program. Being Ojibwe, from Whitesand First Nation, she was happy to secure a meaningful work placement cooking for *Larga Baffin*, a local medical boarding home for those travelling from Nunavut for medical services.

Upon completing her placement and graduating as class valedictorian, we hired her at Chef Ric’s without hesitation!

“I’ve been given the opportunity to find stability for my children, and for that, I’m so thankful.”

Here’s one of Raven’s favourite Chef Ric’s recipes →

HOMESTYLE MAC & CHEESE

Serves 8–10

INGREDIENTS

1.5 LBS	SCOObI DOO PASTA	uncooked
3 TBSP	BUTTER	
2 TBSP	ALL-PURPOSE FLOUR	
½ TSP	SALT	
⅛ TSP	GROUND BLACK PEPPER	
1.5 CUPS	MILK	2%
¾ CUP	CREAM	35%
2.5 CUPS	CHEDDAR CHEESE	shredded (or a mix of different cheeses)
3 TSP	BREADCRUMBS	



DIRECTIONS

- 1 Cook pasta until al dente. Drain and set aside
- 2 **Sauce:**
 - Melt the butter in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Blend in the flour, salt, and pepper. Cook for 2 minutes.
 - Slowly add the milk and cream, stirring constantly, and cook over medium-low heat for 5–7 minutes, or until the mixture has thickened (like the consistency of gravy).
 - Remove from heat and stir in 1 cup shredded cheese, stirring just until melted.
- 3 Add the cooked pasta and toss to coat. Pour half of the pasta mixture into the prepared baking dish. Sprinkle ½ cup cheese over the top. Add remaining pasta and sprinkle with remaining cheese.
- 4 Top with a mixture of shredded cheese and breadcrumbs
- 5 Bake at 350F until golden brown — 15–20 minutes

KENZIE

Kenzie is a young man who turned his life around, thanks in part our program.

As a teenager, Kenzie experimented with cannabis, unaware that for some young people, it can induce psychosis. As this side-effect worsened, he became homeless.

“I was struggling, it was a really rough road”

As he worked to reclaim his health and independence, Kenzie applied to the FSTP. When I interviewed him, he was raw and inexperienced, but I saw how passionate he was to make something of himself, thinking back to my time as a teenager. So, I told him: *“I’m going to make a chef out of you.”*

Fast forward to his graduation ceremony, after he had even exceeded my expectations in the program. I was so proud to offer him a role with The Mission.

*“My life has improved 100%.
It’s completely turned around.”*

I originally hired Kenzie to make soup for shelter guests. He showed so much determination that he eventually went on to work on the food truck to serve meals to hungry residents across the city, including this recipe →



SHEPHERD’S PIE

Serves 8–10

INGREDIENTS

1.5 LBS GROUND BEEF

1.5 CUPS ONION | fine diced

1 TSP GARLIC

1.5 TSP BEEF BASE

¼ CUP COMPLETE GRAVY MIX

½ CUP WATER

TO TASTE PEPPER

1.5 CUPS CREAMED CORN

4 CUPS MASHED POTATOES



DIRECTIONS

- 1 Sweat onions until soft in frying pan
- 2 Add ground beef, garlic and beef base
- 3 Cook until beef is cooked through, breaking up the beef so there are no large chunks
- 4 Drain fat
- 5 Mix gravy mix and water until no lumps
- 6 Add gravy mix to meat

Assembly:

- 1 Spread meat mixture evenly at the bottom of pan
- 2 Spread cream corn over meat mixture
- 3 Spread mashed potatoes over creamed corn mixture
- 4 Place in a 400F oven and cook until golden brown on top — around 30 minutes



CHEF RIC'S CATERING

As our Food Services Training Program grew, so too did our catering services.

When I first suggested catering to raise funds for The Ottawa Mission, some doubted if anyone would want to hire a caterer affiliated with a homeless shelter... But I knew how capable our chefs are, and how beneficial it would be for our FSTP students in providing them valuable catering experience.

Well, after almost 18 years, we've gone from a handful of bookings to catering some of the biggest events in Ottawa. Catering revenue has grown by almost 70 times what it was in the beginning, and it provides ongoing support to the FSTP and selected Mission programs.

We're now catering events for the *Parliament of Canada*, the VIP section of *Bluesfest*, feeding *The Ottawa RedBlacks* during their training camp, and so many other weddings, events, and fundraisers across Ottawa.

And we're still growing! You can have Chef Ric's cater your event while supporting the FSTP by visiting chefrics.com

WHY I WORK FOR THE FSTP... Hilary



Our hardworking FSTP staff and volunteers are the heartbeat of this program.

I asked our FSTP Coordinator, Hilary, to talk about a time where she witnessed the positive impact of our program:



There are so many moments, so it's hard to choose just one to talk about! In the fall of 2023, we had a large cohort of refugees and newcomers. They were mainly young women who were staying in the *Heron Road Community Centre Shelter* while they studied and trained with us.

They were so hardworking, and it was memorable to be part of their journeys as they stabilized their lives in Canada. They'd come to class all excited to share when one of them had found housing and we would all celebrate together! We would give them the day off class if they ever needed to go look for housing, or attend important appointments, and things like that.

These women came to Ottawa and Canada with next to nothing. Already facing so many barriers to a secure life: uncertain housing, staying in shelters, no source of income, difficulties with English, no employment connections, it was so important that the FSTP be that barrier-free program that helped get them back on their feet and into fulfilling, independent lives.



WHAT'S TO COME

Just because we've hit a 20-year milestone of progress, impact, and innovation, that doesn't mean we're going to slow down. Our team is always looking for ways to improve and expand the program.

In the near future, we have plans to:



Add a part-time FSTP staff position dedicated to helping students with resume writing, job finding, and all things employment in the culinary field.

This comes on the heels of us phasing-out our partnership with St. Lawrence College, who've done an as awesome job in the 15+ years they've helped our students find work. We're excited to bring this role in-house!



Continue to grow our mentorship program, to extend beyond our youth students and include mentorships for all students.



Enhance our partnerships and contacts with Indigenous organizations to promote the program and further help the disproportionate number of Indigenous people needing the services of The Ottawa Mission.



Extend our After Care program from one year to two to double the time we support our graduates' transition into their newfound careers and lives.



And of course, we're always looking to grow the program and add more students. Right now, we are maxed out at an intake of approximately 30 students per class, but if we can find ways to expand, we will!

FOUR
months
TO A
FRESH
start



*Every student has
a different story.*

**No matter the paths taken
in their past, Chef Ric and
The Mission have created a space
where students can gather
to learn and have that
second chance in life.**

— “ —

CHEF CLAUDE LEBLOND
FSTP Volunteer Instructor

